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EDUCATION WILL SOLVE THE RACE PROBLEM. A REPLY.

BY BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, PRESIDENT OF THE TUSKEGEE NORMAL
AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE, TUSKEGEE, ALABAMA.

“WILL Education Solve the Race Problem?” is the title of an interesting article in the June number of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, by Professor John Roach Straton, of Macon, Georgia. My own belief is that education will finally solve the race problem. In giving some reasons for this faith, I wish to express my appreciation of the sincere and kindly spirit in which Professor Straton’s article is written. I grant that much that he emphasizes as to present conditions is true. When we recall the past, these conditions could not be expected to be otherwise; but I see no reason for discouragement or loss of faith. When I speak of education as a solution for the race problem, I do not mean education in the narrow sense, but education which begins in the home and includes training in industry and in habits of thrift, as well as mental, moral and religious discipline, and the broader education which comes from contact with the public sentiment of the community in which one lives. Nor do I confine myself to the education of the negro. Many persons, in discussing the effect that education will have in working out the negro question, overlook the helpful influence that will ultimately come through the broader and more generous education of all the race elements of the South. As all classes of whites in the South become more generally educated in the broader sense, race prejudice will be tempered and they will assist in lifting up the black man.

In our desire to see a better condition of affairs, we are too often inclined to grow impatient because a whole race is not elevated in a short time, very much as a house is built. In all the history of mankind there have been few such radical, social and

economic changes in the policy of a nation as have been effected within thirty-five years in this country, with respect to the change of four million and a half of slaves into four million and a half of freemen (now nearly ten million). When all the conditions of the past are considered, and compared with the present, I think the White South, the North and the Negro are to be congratulated on the fact that conditions are no worse, but are as encouraging as they are. The sudden change from slavery to freedom, from restraint to liberty, was a tremendous one; and the wonder is, not that the negro has not done better, but that he has done as well as he has. Every thoughtful student of the subject expected that the first two or three generations of freedom would lead to excesses and mistakes on the part of the negro, which would in many cases cause moral and physical degeneration, such as would seem to the superficial observer to indicate conditions that could not be overcome. It was to be anticipated that, in the first generation at least, the tendency would be, among a large number, to seek the shadow instead of the substance; to grasp after the mere signs of the highest civilization instead of the reality; to be led into the temptation of believing that they could secure, in a few years, that which it has taken other races thousands of years to obtain. Any one who has the daily opportunity of studying the negro at first hand cannot but gain the impression that there are indisputable evidences that the negro throughout the country is settling down to a hard, common sense view of life; that he is fast learning that a race, like an individual, must pay for everything it gets—the price of beginning at the bottom of the social scale and gradually working up by natural processes to the highest civilization. The exaggerated impressions that the first years of freedom naturally brought are giving way to an earnest, practical view of life and its responsibilities.

Let us take a broad, generous survey of the negro race as it came into the country, represented by twenty savages, in 1619, and trace its progress through slavery, through the Civil War period, and through freedom to the present moment. Who will be brave enough to say that the negro race, as a whole, has not increased in numbers and grown stronger mentally, morally, religiously, industrially, and in the accumulation of property? In a word, has not the negro, at every stage, shown a tendency to grow into harmony with the best type of American civilization?

Professor Straton lays special stress upon the moral weakness of the race. Perhaps the worst feature of slavery was that it prevented the development of a family life, with all of its far-reaching significance. Except in rare cases, the uncertainties of domicile made family life, during two hundred and fifty years of slavery, an impossibility. There is no institution so conducive to right and high habits of physical and moral life as the home. No race starting in absolute poverty could be expected, in the brief period of thirty-five years, to purchase homes and build up a family life and influence that would have a very marked impression upon the life of the masses. The negro has not had time enough to collect the broken and scattered members of his family. For the sake of illustration, and to employ a personal reference, I do not know who my own father was; I have no idea who my grandmother was; I have or had uncles, aunts and cousins, but I have no knowledge as to where most of them now are. My case will illustrate that of hundreds of thousands of black people in every part of our country. Perhaps those who direct attention to the negro's moral weakness, and compare his moral progress with that of the whites, do not consider the influence of the memories which cling about the old family homestead upon the character and aspirations of individuals. The very fact that the white boy is conscious that, if he fails in life, he will disgrace the whole family record, extending back through many generations, is of tremendous value in helping him to resist temptations. On the other hand, the fact that the individual has behind him and surrounding him proud family history and connections serves as a stimulus to make him overcome obstacles, when striving for success. All this should be taken into consideration, to say nothing of the physical, mental and moral training which individuals of the white race receive in their homes. We must not pass judgment upon the negro too soon. It requires centuries for the influence of home, school, church and public contact to permeate the mass of millions of people, so that the upward tendency may be apparent to the casual observer. It is too soon to decide what effect general education will have upon the rank and file of the negro race, because the masses have not been educated.

Throughout the South, especially in the Gulf States, the great bulk of the black population lives in the country districts. In these districts the schools are rarely in session more than three

months of the year. When this is considered, in connection with poor teachers, poor school-houses, and an almost entire lack of apparatus, it is obvious that we must wait longer before we can judge, even approximately, of the effect that general education will have upon the whole population. Most writers and speakers upon the subject of the negro's non-progressiveness base their arguments upon alleged facts and statistics of the life of negroes in the large cities. This is hardly fair. Before the Civil War the negro was not, to any considerable extent, a denizen of the large cities. Most of them lived on the plantations. The negro living in the cities has undergone two marked changes: (1.) the change from slavery to freedom; (2.) the change from country life to city life. At first the tendency of both these changes was, naturally, to unsettle, to intoxicate and to lead the negro to wrong ideas of life. The change from country life to city life, in the case of the white man, is about as marked as in the case of the negro. The average negro in the city, with all of its excitements and temptations, has not lived there more than half a generation. It is, therefore, too soon to reach a definite conclusion as to what the permanent effect of this life upon him will be. This, I think, explains the difference between the moral condition of the negro, to which Professor Straton refers, in the States where there has been little change in the old plantation life, as compared with that in the more northern of the Atlantic States, where the change from country to city life is more marked.

Judging from close observation, my belief is that, after the negro has overcome the false idea which city life emphasizes, two or three generations will bring about an earnestness and steadiness of purpose which do not now generally obtain. As the negro secures a home in the city, learns the lessons of industry and thrift and becomes a taxpayer, his moral life improves. The influence of home surroundings, of the school, the church and public sentiment will be more marked and have a more potent effect in causing him to withstand temptations. But, notwithstanding the shortness of the time which the negro has had in which to get schooled to his new life, any one who has visited the large cities of Europe will readily testify that the visible signs of immorality in those cities are far greater than among the colored people of America. Prostitution for gain is far more prevalent in the cities of Europe than among the colored people of our cities.

Professor Straton says that the negro has degenerated in morals since he became free; in other words, that his condition in this respect is not as hopeful as it was during the early period of slavery. I do not think it wise to place too much reliance upon such a view of the matter, because there are too few facts upon which to base a comparison. The bald statement that the negro was not given to crime during slavery proves little. Slavery represented an unnatural condition of life, in which certain physical checks were kept constantly upon the individual. To say that the negro was at his best, morally, during the period of slavery is about the same as to say that the two thousand prisoners in the State prison and the city penal institutions in the city of Boston are the most righteous two thousand people in Boston. I question whether one can find two thousand persons in Boston who will equal these two thousand imprisoned criminals in the mere negative virtues. During the days of slavery the negro was rarely brought into the court to be tried for crime; hence, there was almost no public record of crimes committed by him. Each master, in most cases, punished his slave as he thought best, and as little as possible was said about it outside of his little plantation world. The improper relations between the sexes, with which the black race is now frequently charged in most sections of the South, were encouraged or winked at, under the slavery system, because of the financial value of the slaves. A custom that was fostered for three centuries cannot be blotted out in one generation.

In estimating the progress of a race, we should not consider alone the degree of success which has been actually attained, but also the obstacles which have been overcome in reaching that success. Judged by the obstacles overcome, few races, if any, in history have made progress commensurate with that of the colored people of the United States, in the same length of time. It may be conceded that the present generation of colored people does not compare favorably with the present generation of the white race, because of the reasons I have already given, and the further reason that on account of the black man's poverty of means to employ lawyers to have his case properly appealed to the higher courts, and his inability to furnish bonds, his criminal record is much worse than that of the white race, both in the Northern and Southern States. The Southern States, as a whole, have not yet

reached a point where they are able to provide reformatories for juvenile offenders, and consequently most of these are sent to the State prison, where the records show that the same individuals are often committed over and over again, because, in the first instance, the child prisoner, instead of being reformed, becomes simply hardened to prison life. In the North, it is true, the negro has the benefit of the reformatories; but the unreasonable prejudice which prevents him from securing employment in the shops and the factories more than offsets this advantage. Hundreds of negroes in the North become criminals who would become strong and useful men if they were not discriminated against as bread winners.

In the matter of assault upon white women, the negro is placed in a peculiar attitude. While this vile crime is always to be condemned in the strongest language, and should be followed by the severest legal punishment, yet the custom of lynching a negro when he is accused of committing such a crime calls the attention of the whole country to it, in such a way as is not always true in the case of a white man, North or South. Any one who reads the daily papers carefully knows that such assaults are constantly charged against white men in the North and in the South; but, because the white man, in most cases, is punished by the regular machinery of the courts, attention is seldom attracted to his crime outside of the immediate neighborhood where the offense is committed. This, to say nothing of the cases where the victim of lynch law could prove his innocence, if he were given a hearing before a cool, level-headed set of jurors in open court, makes the apparent contrast unfavorable to the black man. It is hardly proper, in summing up the value of any race, to dwell almost continually upon its weaker element. As other men are judged, so should the negro be judged, by the best that the race can produce, rather than by the worst. Keep the searchlight constantly focused upon the criminal and worthless element of any people, and few among all the races and nations of the world can be accounted successful. More attention should be directed to individuals who have succeeded, and less to those who have failed. And negroes who have succeeded grandly can be found in every corner of the South.

I doubt that much reliance can safely be placed upon mere ability to read and write a little as a means of saving any race.

Education should go further. One of the weaknesses in the negro's present condition grows out of failure, in the early years of his freedom, to teach him, in connection with thorough academic and religious branches, the dignity and beauty of labor, and to give him a working knowledge of the industries by which he must earn a subsistence. But the main question is: What is the present tendency of the race, where it has been given a fair opportunity, and where there has been thorough education of hand, head and heart? This question I answer from my own experience of nineteen years in the heart of the South, and from my daily contact with whites and blacks. In the first place, the social barrier prevents most white people from coming into real contact with the higher and better side of the negro's social life. The negro loafer, drunkard and gambler can be seen without social contact. The higher life cannot be seen without social contact. As I write these lines, I am in the home of a negro friend, where in the matter of cleanliness, sweetness, attractiveness, modern conveniences and other evidences of intelligence, morality and culture the home would compare favorably with that of any white family in the neighborhood; and yet, this negro home is unknown outside of the little town where it exists. To really know the life of this family, one would have to become a part of it for days, as I have been. One of the most encouraging changes that have taken place in the moral life of the negro race in the past thirty years is the creation of a growing public sentiment which draws a line between the good and bad, the clean and unclean. This change is fast taking place in every part of the country. It is one that cannot be accurately measured by any table of statistics. To be able to appreciate it fully, one must himself be a part of the social life of the race. The significance of it is all the more important when it is remembered that, only a few years ago, the colored woman who sustained immoral relations with some white man was envied and looked upon as a social leader. There are now few communities in the South where such a woman is recognized in the social life of the best colored people. This change is yet far from complete, but the tendency is strongly in this direction, and is growing and broadening. In a few more years the moral life of the negro will be greatly strengthened by that education which comes from the force of public opinion.

As to the effect of industrial education in the solution of the

race problem, we should not expect too much from it in a short time. To the late General S. C. Armstrong, of Hampton Institute, in Virginia, should be given the credit, mainly, for inaugurating this system of education. When the Hampton Institute began the systematic, industrial training of the negro, such training was unpopular among a large class of colored people. Later, when the same system was started by me at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, in Alabama, it was still unpopular, especially in that part of the South. But the feeling against it has now almost completely disappeared in all parts of the country; so much so, that I do not consider the opposition of a few people here and there as of material consequence. Where there is one who opposes it there are thousands who indorse it. So far as the colored people are concerned, I consider that the battle for this principle has been fought and the victory won. What the colored people are anxious about is that, with industrial education, they shall have thorough mental and religious training; and in this they are right. For bringing about this change in the attitude of the colored people, much credit should be given to the John F. Slater Fund, under the wise guidance of such men as Mr. Morris K. Jesup and Dr. J. L. M. Curry, as well as to Dr. H. B. Frissell, of the Hampton Institute. That such institutions for industrial training as the Hampton Institute and the Tuskegee Institute are always crowded with the best class of negro students from nearly every State in the Union, and that every year they are compelled to refuse admission to hundreds of others, for lack of room and means, is sufficient evidence that the black race has come to appreciate the value of industrial education. The almost pathetic demand of the colored people for industrial education in every corner of the South is added evidence of the growing intelligence of the race. In saying what I do in regard to industrial education, I do not wish to be understood as meaning that the education of the negro should be confined to that kind alone, because we need men and women well educated in other directions; but, for the masses, industrial education is the supreme need. I repeat that we must not expect too much from this training, in the redemption of a race, in the space of a few years.

There are few institutions in the South where industrial training is given upon a large and systematic scale, and the graduates from these institutions have not had time to make them-

selves felt to any very large extent upon the life of the rank and file of the people. But what are the indications? As I write, I have before me a record of graduates, which is carefully compiled each year. Of the hundreds who have been trained at the Tuskegee Institute, less than ten per cent. have failed, and less than five per cent. have failed because of any moral weakness. These graduates, as well as hundreds of other students who could not remain to finish the course, are now at work in the school-room, in the field, in the shop, in the home, or as teachers of industry, or in some way they are making their education felt in the lifting up of the colored people. Wherever these graduates go, they not only help their own race, but, in nearly every case, they win the respect and confidence of the white people.

Not long ago, I sent a number of letters to white men, in all the Southern States, asking, among others, this question: "Judged by actual observation in your own community, what is the effect of education upon the negro?" In asking this question, I was careful to explain that by education I did not mean a mere smattering, but a thorough education of the head, heart and hand. I received about three hundred replies, and there was only one who said that education did not help the negro. Most of the others were emphatic in stating that education made the negro a better citizen. In all the record of crime in the South, there are very few instances where a black man who has been thoroughly educated in the respects I have mentioned has been even charged with the crime of assaulting a woman. In fact, I do not know of a single instance of this kind, whether the man was educated in an industrial school or in a college.

The following extracts from a letter written by a Southern white man to the *Daily Advertiser*, of Montgomery, Alabama, contains most valuable testimony. The letter refers to convicts in Alabama, most of whom are colored:

"I was conversing not long ago with the warden of one of our mining prisons, containing about 500 convicts. The warden is a practical man, who has been in charge of prisoners for more than fifteen years, and has no theories of any kind to support. I remarked to him that I wanted some information as to the effect of manual training in preventing criminality, and asked him to state what per cent. of the prisoners under his charge had received any manual training, besides the acquaintance with the crudest agricultural labor. He replied: 'Perhaps about one per cent.' He added: 'No; much less

than that. We have here at present only one mechanic; that is, there is one man who claims to be a house painter.'

" 'Have you any shoemakers?'

" 'Never have had a shoemaker.'

" 'Have you any tailors?'

" 'Never have had a tailor.'

" 'Any printers?'

" 'Never have had a printer.'

" 'Any carpenters?'

" 'Never have had a carpenter. There is not a man in this prison that could saw to a straight line.' "

Now, these facts seem to show that manual training is almost as good a preventive for criminality as vaccination is for smallpox.

We can best judge further of the value of industrial and academic education by using a few statistics bearing upon the State of Virginia, where graduates from the Hampton Institute and other schools have gone in large numbers and have had an opportunity, in point of time, to make their influence apparent upon the negro population. These statistics, based on census reports, were compiled mainly by persons connected with the Hampton Negro Conference:

"Taking taxation as a basis, the colored people of the State of Virginia contributed, in 1898, directly to the expenses of the State Government, the sum of \$9,576.76, and for schools \$3,239.41 from their personal property, a total of \$12,816.17; while, from their real estate, for the purpose of the commonwealth there was paid by them \$34,203.53, and for schools \$11,457.22, or a total of \$45,760.75—a grand total of \$58,576.92.

"The report for the same year shows them to own 987,118 acres of land valued at \$3,800,459, improved by buildings valued at \$2,056,490, a total of \$5,856,949. In the towns and cities, they own lots assessed at \$2,154,331, improved by buildings valued at \$3,400,636, a total of \$5,554,967 for town property, and a grand total of \$11,411,916 of their property of all kinds in the commonwealth. A comparative statement of different years would doubtless show a general upward tendency.

"The counties of Accomac, Essex, King and Queen, Middlesex, Mathews, Northampton, Northumberland, Richmond, Westmoreland, Gloucester, Princess Anne and Lancaster, all agricultural, show an aggregate of 114,197 acres held by negroes in 1897, the last year accounted for in official reports, against 108,824 held the previous year, an increase of 5,379, or nearly five per cent. The total valuation of land owned by negroes in the same counties for 1897, is \$547,800 against \$496,385 for the year next preceding, a gain of \$51,150, or more than ten per cent. Their personal property, as assessed in 1897, was \$517,560, in 1896, \$527,688, a loss of \$10,128. Combining the real and personal property for 1897, we have \$1,409,059, against \$1,320,504 for 1896, a net gain of \$88,555, an increase of six and one-half per cent.

"The records of Gloucester, Lancaster, Middlesex, Princess Anne,

Northumberland, Northampton, King and Queen, Essex, and Westmoreland, where the colored population exceeds the white, show that the criminal expense for 1896 was \$14,313.29, but for 1897 it was only \$8,538.12, a saving of \$5,774.17 to the State, or a falling off of forty per cent. This does not tell the whole story. In the first named year twenty-six persons were convicted of felonies, with sentences in the penitentiary, while in the year succeeding only nine, or one-third as many, were convicted of the graver offences of the law."

According to these returns, in 1892, when the colored people formed 41 per cent. of the population, they owned 2.75 per cent. of the total number of acres assessed for taxation, and 3.40 per cent. of the buildings; in 1898, although not constituting more than 37 per cent. of the population (by reason of white immigration), they owned 3.23 per cent. of the acreage assessed, and 4.64 per cent. of the buildings—a gain of nearly one-third in six years.

According to statistics gathered by a graduate of the Hampton Institute, in twelve counties in Virginia, there has been in the part of the State covered by the investigation an increase of 5,379 acres in the holdings of colored people, and an increase of \$51,150 in the value of their land. In nine counties there has been a decrease in the number of persons charged with felonies and sent to the penitentiary from twenty-six in 1896 to nine in 1897.

I do not believe that the negro will grow weaker in morals and less strong in numbers because of his immediate contact with the white race. The first-class life insurance companies are considered excellent authorities as to the longevity of individuals and races; and the fact that most of them now seek to insure the educated class of blacks is a good test of what these companies think of the effect of education upon the mortality of the race.

The case of Jamaica, in the West Indies, presents a good example by which to judge the future of the negro in the United States, so far as mortality is concerned. The argument drawn from Jamaica is valuable, chiefly because the race there has been free for sixty-two years, instead of thirty-five, as in our own country. During the years of freedom, the blacks of Jamaica have been in constant contact with the white man. Slavery was abolished in Jamaica in 1838. The census of 1844 showed that there were 364,000 negroes in the Island. In 1871 there were 493,000, and in 1891 there were 610,579. In a history of Jamaica written by Mr. W. P. Livingston, who spent ten years studying the conditions of the Island, we find that, immediately after emancipation

in the Island, there was something of the reaction that has taken place in some parts of our country; but that recently there has been a settling down to real, earnest life on the part of a large proportion of the race. After calling attention to certain weak and unsatisfactory phases in the life of the Jamaica negro, Mr. Livingston says:

"This, then, is the race as it exists to-day, a product of sixty years of freedom; on the whole, a plain, honest, Anglicized people, with no peculiarity except a harmless ignorance and superstition. Looking at it in contrast with what it was at the beginning of the period, one cannot but be impressed with the wonderful progress it has made; and where there has been steady progress in the past, there is infinite hope for the future. * * * * * The impact of Roman power and culture on the northern barbarians of the United Kingdom did not make itself felt for three hundred years. * * * * * Instead of dying off before civilization, he (the negro) grows stronger as he comes within its best influences."

In comparing the black race of Jamaica with that of the United States, it should be borne in mind that the negro in America enjoys advantages and encouragements which the race in Jamaica does not possess.

What I have said, I repeat, is based largely upon my own experience and observation, rather than upon statistics. I do not wish to convey the impression that the problem before our country is not a large and serious one; but I do believe that in a judicious system of industrial, mental and religious training we have found the method of solving it. What we most need is the money necessary to make the system effective. The indications are hopeful, not discouraging; and not the least encouraging is the fact that, in addition to the munificence of Northern philanthropists and the appropriations of the Southern State Governments from common taxation, with the efforts of the negro himself, we have now reached a point at which the solution of this problem is drawing to its aid some of the most thoughtful and cultured white men and women of the South, as is indicated by the article to which I have already referred, from the pen of Professor John Roach Straton, a representative of the best element of the South.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON.